



# STATE OF INDIANA

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## PUBLIC ACCESS COUNSELOR HEATHER NEAL

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### News Release

#### For immediate release

### Public Access Counselor eliminates two-year backlog

INDIANAPOLIS (February 8, 2008) – Public Access Counselor Heather Willis Neal today announces her office has eliminated a backlog of dozens of informal inquiries dating back to 2005. The backlog represented requests from private citizens as well as public officials, each seeking a written opinion in answer to a question or series of questions about Indiana's public access laws.

Neal was appointed by Governor Daniels on July 1, 2007. Upon taking office, she began working to address the backlog in the order the requests were received. The oldest request dated back to April 2005. The majority of the requests were received in 2006 and early 2007. The informal opinion requests related to a variety of public access matters, like whether a non-profit corporation or other entity that receives public funds is a public agency for the purposes of Indiana's Access to Public Records Act or Open Door Law.

The Public Access Counselor's office serves as a resource for members of the public, the media, and public officials. The two-person office answers thousands of telephone calls and electronic mail questions each year. In some instances, an individual seeks a written opinion related to a question to which the answer may not be specifically addressed in the law or may not have been addressed by an Indiana court. As a result, the counselor issues an informal opinion. Because the answer will often help a public agency avoid a violation of the law, it is important the response be provided quickly. Neal now expects to issue all informal opinions within three weeks of receipt of the request.

"It is important that private citizens and public officials alike can get quick answers to their questions about public access laws. In most cases, we can answer a question when it is asked by telephone or email," Neal said. "But in some cases, the question requires a little more research. Even then, it is still important to provide an answer as quickly as possible so we can help to avoid violations of the public access laws before they might occur."

Many informal opinions as well as all formal opinions and other resources are available via the counselor's website at [www.IN.gov/pac](http://www.IN.gov/pac).